

P 061329Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA  
TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2011

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 000113

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [MT](#)

SUBJECT: MALTA PROPOSES TO HOST EU ASYLUM AGENCY

Classified By: PolOff MCummings for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Malta has formally offered to host the European Union's Asylum Agency, which will be established within the next year to coordinate the EU asylum policy, increase cooperation between member states, lend assistance to states facing the greatest pressure and harmonize national practices. Malta's Minister for Justice and Home Affairs (MJHA), Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, proposed that the agency be based in Malta at a meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels on February 26. Mifsud Bonnici indicated that Malta & could be a good place to host the new structure as it will also give more visibility to our migration problems... it will also provide more immediate help.<sup>8</sup>

¶2. (SBU) Mario Caruana, MJHA Director for Operations, told PolOff on February 27 that Malta had offered to host the Asylum Agency in order to focus EU attention on the significant pressure that Malta faces with the asylum seekers. Malta would not run the agency, but Caruana pointed out that by hosting it, Malta would greatly benefit; and that wherever the Agency ended up being located, Malta would benefit from the harmonization of border and asylum obligations. One core objective of the Agency would be to send specialized teams of experts to member states affected by extraordinary pressure of receiving asylum seekers. These teams will assist the national authorities in the identification, translation, interpretation, accommodation and repatriation issues related to asylum seekers. As Malta is on the front lines, receiving thousands of asylum seekers each year, Caruana opined, the country was clearly a good fit to host the agency.

¶3. (SBU) The PM's chief of staff told Charge' last week that Malta was the first, and so far the only country to formally offer to host the Agency, and that Italy was officially backing Malta's bid. Press reports indicate that Cyprus and Greece have also shown interest in hosting the agency and that those countries believe that wherever the Agency ends up, it should be based in the Mediterranean.

Comment

-----

¶4. (C) With the arrival of over six hundred new immigrants, on three overloaded ships, in January and February (normally the off-season), the immigration issue has quickly risen to the top of the public agenda in Malta -- supplanting even the financial crisis as a cause for worry and agitated debate. Whether it is successful or not, the bid to host the EU Asylum Agency gave the government a rare chance to be seen as being proactive in addressing a problem that has no easy solutions.

DAVIS